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**RELEASES FROM LAKE OKEECHOBEE TO THE ST. LUCIE AND
CALOOSAATCHEE RIVERS REDUCED STARTING TUESDAY**

**Lake levels on downward trend – for now
Lake recedes below 16.25 feet but still extremely high
Everglades Water Conservation Areas to the south remain full**

Water managers from the South Florida Water Management and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will decrease water releases from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers on Tuesday, Aug. 2, beginning at 7 a.m. On July 14, the level was 16.61 feet and releases from Lake Okeechobee were increased as a preemptive measure to slow the rate of rise of Lake Okeechobee.

Today's lake level is 16.22 feet, falling approximately 4 inches since July 14. Lake releases will be reduced to levels authorized by federal guidelines called the Water Supply and Environmental Regulation Schedule – or WSE – which will still allow critically high lake stages to continue to fall.

“The Corps and the District are keeping our promise to reduce freshwater releases to the estuaries when the lake fell below 16.25 feet. We remain cautious, however, because conditions can change daily,” said Carol Ann Wehle, South Florida Water Management District Executive Director. “We all have to remain aware that Lake Okeechobee and other storage areas are still very high for this time of the year,” said Colonel Robert Carpenter, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District. “This has been a wet summer and we still have three months of hurricane season ahead of us. Flood protection continues to be our highest priority, but we will continue to balance our actions with concerns for all other parts of the ecosystem.”

While the daily deluges have let up a bit for now and water flowing into the lake from the Upper Kissimmee Basin north of the lake has stabilized, the entire, interconnected region remains saturated. The Everglades Water Conservation Areas south of the lake remain full. These extremely wet conditions continue to severely limit water movement and storage options. The lake is almost 4 feet higher today than this time last year, and 1.3 feet above average.

Because the watershed storage is saturated, a small amount of rainfall can produce a tremendous volume of water funneling into Lake Okeechobee. In comparison to the inflow capacity, the available outlets for making controlled releases out of the lake are much more physically limited in size. The Caloosahatchee River has the largest outflow capacity, followed by the St. Lucie and then the southern canals. In addition to the capacity limitations of the southern outlets, extremely high levels in the downstream Everglades Water Conservation Areas have limited the amount of water released through these canals. Maximum safe discharges are being made from the WCAs to tide via the east coast canals between storm events when capacity allows. Scientists and engineers at both agencies are continuing to evaluate historical data and develop the best strategy to balance the overall system.

The expected discharge from the St. Lucie Lock and Dam (S-80) on the St. Lucie Canal will be 2,500 cubic feet per second and Moore Haven Lock and Dam (S-77) on the Caloosahatchee River at 4,500 cubic feet per second.

The Herbert Hoover Dike, a 140-mile long flood control embankment, surrounds the lake. The Corps' South Florida Operations Office regularly maintains and inspects the dike as part of our normal monitoring plan. Data collected during these inspections are evaluated against past performance of the dike and provide information for preventative actions. Inspections to date have found the dike remains in good condition. The frequency of inspections changed from weekly to monthly when the lake level declined to 16.5 feet on July 24.

The spillway operators continue to monitor and adjust the discharges depending on local runoff, downstream conditions and changes in the tidal cycle.

Water level data for Lake Okeechobee and the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project can be found on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District Water Management and Meteorology Section homepage at <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/>.